Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

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Access: Accessing the Web Site and Maintaining Web Site Users

Q1: How do I setup a new user?

A: Contact your Employer Administrator. He or she will send a link to the Secure Employer Website registration page. The employee will need to complete the on-line registration process, complete the security paperwork and send to CalSTRS (paperwork available after registration page is complete). The Employer Administrator and CalSTRS will authorize and activate the account.

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Q2: There used to be three security forms to fill out for new users; what happened?

A: We have condensed the security paperwork down to one form. A new SEW user only needs to fill out one form and submit it to their SEW Employer Administrator and CalSTRS for access.

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Q3: I'm an Employer Administrator and I need to deactivate a SEW user who no longer works in my office, how can I do this?

A: Simply email ServiceDesk@CalSTRS.com with the following information about the user no longer needing access to SEW:

- Name of the person being deactivated
- SEW user ID of the person being deactivated
- Your name and phone number (in case CalSTRS has questions).

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Q4: Where do I find the security form that is required for new SEW users?

A: There are multiple links throughout the Web site to find the security form. The Forms link on the Home page and the Terms and Conditions page found here (https://sew.calstrs.com/CalSTRSSewWebUI/WebUISupportFiles/HtmlFiles/terms.aspx) contains links and instructions to the required security form. A registrant also receives an email notification after completing the registration process. The email contains a link to the Terms and Conditions page.

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Q5: Can I use my Remote Employer Access Program (REAP), Virtual Private Network (VPN) or CalSTRS.com Employer Secure Site password to access the Secure Employer Web site?

A: No, to access the Secure Employer Web site, you will need to complete the registration and security forms that your Employer Administrator provides and complete the on-line registration process. You will be able to pick a Secure Employer Web site user ID and password.

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Q6: How do I change my password or Email?

A: There are a few ways to change your password or email address. If your Username and Password are currently working correctly, you can select My Account and Edit. This brings you to an account information page that allows you to type a new password or email address. If you forgot your password, click on the "forgot password" link on the login page. If you are locked out of your account contact your Employer Administrator. He or she will be able to reset your password. You will receive an email with a temporary password.

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Q7: I forgot my password, what can I do?

A: If you forgot your password, you can reset it using the "Forgot your password?" link from the log-in screen.

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Q8: My account is "locked," what can I do?

A: If you attempt to access the Secure Employer Web site too many times with an incorrect password, your account will be locked. You must contact your Employer Administrator to reset your password. If you are an Employer Administrator, another Employer Administrator at your office can do this for you or contact CalSTRS Employer Services at (916) 229-3570 or **employerhelp@CalSTRS.com**.

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Q9: How do I obtain access to additional features on the Web site?

A: Contact your Employer Administrator to request additional permissions on the Web site. If you report both Cash Balance (CB) and Defined Benefit (DB) information, you will need to acquire two usernames. This is true even if your DB submission is just for Accounts Receivable files (buybacks).

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Q10: I am an Employer Administrator and cannot find a user that is supposed to be on my maintenance list. How do I grant them access rights?

A: Your report unit user may report Cash Balance benefits directly to CalSTRS as a report source, if this is the case, the user will have a Cash Balance administrator for their report source. If the district is a Cash Balance report source, they can only transmit Cash Balance files and can only view Cash Balance reports. The report unit user should also register as a Defined Benefit user with a second, Defined Benefit, profile to transmit any other files to CalSTRS (like buyback files). You can then grant them access rights to their DB account.

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Q11: Where do I find a contact list of Employer Administrators?

A: Navigate to the Home page and click the Help link in the right hand navigation under Web Site Information.

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Q12: Does the Secure Employer Web Site require any additional software to make use of its functionality?

A: The Secure Employer Web site has features which require Adobe® Reader®. If you need to download and install the free Adobe® Reader® click here: Adobe® Reader®.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q13: What Internet browsers will the Secure Employer Web site run on?

A: CalSTRS recommends using Internet Explorer 5.5 or above. If you are not using the recommended browser, you may be able to login, but could experience problems viewing the web site. To find out what browser version you're using, select the Help menu from the menu bar at the top of your browser window. Then click About to see further information about your browser. In general, the newer the version, the less trouble your Web browser should present. (Newer browsers have additional functionality and have corrected problems from earlier versions. In addition, some older releases may be incompatible with new features of the Secure Employer Web site.)

Occasionally, browser upgrades are released with bugs or glitches that have not been fully resolved. If you've downloaded a newly released browser and have difficulties with the Secure Employer Web site, or other sites, check the vendor's download site for advisories and/or "patches" (downloadable code fixes).

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Uploading Files- Understanding the Upload File Processes

Q1: How do I upload files?

A: Click on Manage Files from the home page. Select the Upload File tab and follow the on-screen instructions. The SEW User Manual provides step by step instructions for Uploading files. Note: Only Defined Benefit (F496) and Cash Balance (VDF) partial and complete files are UPLOADED to the Web site. All other file types are TRANSMITTED to CalSTRS for processing using this feature.

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Q2: What is the difference between transmitting a file and uploading a file?

A: Uploaded files are subjected to integrity checks and business rule edits before they can be transmitted to CalSTRS for processing. Transmitted files are sent directly to CalSTRS system for processing. Partial files can only be uploaded.

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Q3: What is a "Partial" F496 or "Partial" VDF and what is it used for?

A: You can upload and process an incomplete F496 or VDF. This feature can be used to evaluate Contribution Lines for a specific Report Unit or group of Report Units. This feature is also available to Report Unit users if their SEW Employer Administrator provide them with permission.

CalSTRS recommends having Report Units upload contribution lines on partial files and make corrections until the file is clean. Corrected files can be uploaded again and the Report Source can consolidate into a final, complete file. Refer to the "SEW Contribution File Specification 3.0" or the "SEW Voluntary Deduction File (VDF) Specification 1.0" for more information. Both documents are available by going to the SEW Home Page and selecting the Data Submission link.

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Q4: How do I locate a file I uploaded?

A: Once a F496 or VDF file is uploaded, you can locate it by selecting the Active Files tab and entering your search criteria.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q5: I am trying to upload a file and I receive the message "No more than xx uploaded files can be present…" What should I do?

A: Report Units are restricted to no more than 10 Active Files at a time. Report Sources are restricted to no more than 20 Active Files at a time. Select the Active Files tab and enter your search criteria. You must select one or more files and delete them before you can upload another file. Once you have located an uploaded file that you want to delete, click on Delete within the same row as the identified file. A confirmation will appear; click on OK and your file will be deleted. Navigate back to Upload File and upload your file.

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Q6: Is CalSTRS accepting test files?

A: Yes, please contact CalSTRS EmployerHelp at (916) 229-3570 or **employerhelp@CalSTRS.com** to obtain a test schedule and access to the test Web site.

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Transmitting Files: Understanding the Transmit Files Process

Q1: How do I transmit files?

A: Click on Manage Files from the home page and select the Upload File tab. Follow the on-screen instructions. The User Manual provides additional step by step instructions for uploading and transmitting a file. Note: Only Accounts Receivable, Address, Match File (FastTrack) and MR87 (FastTrack) file types are immediately TRANSMITTED to CalSTRS from Upload-File.

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Q2: How long should the transmit file process take?

A: The transmit file process begins immediately, however the time that it takes to complete will vary depending on your connection speed and the size of the file you are trying to transmit. As a result, file transmission may take up to 30 minutes.

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Q3: I can't transmit an Accounts Receivable file, what do I do?

A: First, check to see if you are authorized to transmit files by checking the "My Account" page. If you are not authorized, contact your Employer Administrator.

If you are authorized to transmit an AR file, make sure that you are transmitting the correct file. The CalSTRS employer application suite must be used to create the file and it should have a "DBF" suffix in the name. If you are still having trouble, contact your Employer Administrator.

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Q4: Can I transmit the Remittance Advice from the Secure Employer Web site?

A: Yes, DB or CB Report Sources can submit a Remittance Advice from SEW. Click on the Remittance Advice link and follow the on-screen instructions and fill in the necessary information. Once the Remittance Details have been filled in, click on Submit. Verify the contents on the Remittance Advice Confirmation and click on Confirm.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q5: There is a transmission confirmation screen that says I'm going to get penalized for transmitting a file with errors, is this true?

A: It is the Employer's responsibility to transmit contribution files to CalSTRS that are free of errors. If you transmit a file to CalSTRS with errors, you are responsible for correcting those. Pursuant to Education Code Sections 23006 and 23008, CalSTRS may assess penalties for late or erroneous reporting. You have 60 days after discovery or notification by CalSTRS to submit adjustments. Any adjustment not received, or received later than 60 days may be subject to penalties.

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Q6: What types of files can report units transmit?

A: Report units can transmit Accounts Receivable (Payroll Deduction or Buybacks), Address, MR87, and Match Files. All file submission requires permission from their Employer Administrator.

Top

Q7: If a report source is transmitting an MR87, VDF or F496 for their report units, then how do the report units view only their reports?

A: The Secure Employer Web site separates information on MR87, VDF and F496 reports by report unit and provides them access to only their information. This is only applicable for MR87 reports if the MR87 file transmitted by the report source includes report unit numbers. Report sources will continue to be able to see all of their report units' information. In this instance (Report Source submitting a file for a Report Unit); the Report Unit uses the View Reports link to see the reports.

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Active Files: Understanding the Active Files Tab

Q1: What does "processing integrity checks," "processing business rules" and "processing variance rules" mean in the file status column within Active Files?

A: The Monthly Report (F496), Supplemental Report (F496), Partial Monthly Report (F496), Partial Supplemental Report (F496), Cash Balance (VDF) File or Partial Cash Balance (VDF) File you just uploaded is being subjected to the integrity checks and business rules (and variance rules for F496). When complete, you will be able to access information about the file you just uploaded and any errors or warnings that are present on the file.

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Q2: What does the "Processing Complete" mean in the file status column within Active Files?

A: This is the status assigned to a Partial Monthly Report (F496), Partial Supplemental Report (F496) or Partial Cash Balance (VDF) File when it has completed processing. These types of files cannot be transmitted to CalSTRS.

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Q3: Why hasn't my file status changed from "processing…"?

A: The status displayed next to your file does not update automatically. Refresh the page by clicking on Search within Search Criteria.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q4: How long should my file take to process once it has been uploaded?

A: Depending on the size and current Web site utilization, an F496 file should normally finish processing between1 to 3 hours. It is possible that your file will take more than 3 hours to process. If a file remains in "processing" status for longer than 24 hours and you have refreshed the page by clicking on Search, contact EmployerHelp@calstrs.com or (916) 229-3570.

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Q5: What does "excessive errors" mean in the file status column within Active Files?

A: If your Monthly Report (F496), Supplemental Report (F496), Partial Monthly Report (F496), Partial Supplemental Report (F496), has 50,000 or more integrity check errors, the status reads as "excessive errors." You will receive File Summary information about your file; no detail information is generated and your file is not available for viewing in the Secure Employer Web site. Use the File Summary information to make the necessary corrections and upload a new file.

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Q6: My file status is "ready to transmit". How do I transmit my file within the Active Files tab?

A: Click on the file name and scroll to the bottom of the File Summary page. A Transmit File button appears at the bottom of the page. Click on Transmit File. You will receive a confirmation message that indicates your file was successfully transmitted to CalSTRS.

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Q7: What does "corrections required" mean in the file status column within Active Files?

A: Your file has integrity check or business rule errors that must be resolved before you can transmit it to CalSTRS for final processing. You can view information about the errors on your file by clicking on the file name. The File Summary page lists the total number of errors by error type. If you click on View File Details at the top of the File Summary page you can view detailed information at the line level for every error. Use this information to make the necessary corrections and upload a new file or, if you have the permissions, make the corrections directly in the web site.

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Q8: What does the "Correction Required" check mark mean on the File Summary page?

A: Any integrity check, business rule, variance rule or warning with a check mark means that it must be resolved before you can transmit the file to CalSTRS for final processing. If you click on View File Details at the top of the File Summary page you can view detailed information at the line level for every error. Use this information to make the necessary corrections and upload a new file or, if you have the permissions, make the corrections directly in the web site.

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Q9: What does the "Recheck My File" button mean on the File Summary page?

A: If you upload a file and make corrections to errors using the Secure Employer Web site, your file status will change to "Check Required". Use the Recheck My File button to reprocess the file and prepare it for transmitting to CalSTRS.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Reports: Viewing and Downloading CalSTRS Reports

Q1: How will I know I have a report available for viewing?

A: In your user profile you can choose to receive an e-mail notification when reports are posted. You can also check the "View Reports" link on the Web site. Refer to the CalSTRS Secure Employer Web site User Manual for additional information. Additionally, your Employer Services Representative may notify you personally when a new report requires your attention.

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Q2: How do I download or view a report?

A: Select "View Reports" from the home page and follow the on-screen instructions. Some reports associated with specific files are available by clicking on a file (under Manage Files link) and clicking on the Associated Reports number. For more information, review the CalSTRS Secure Employer Web site User Manual.

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Q3: How do I open or unzip a compressed report file?

A: If you have Windows ME or XP, or Apple OS X, just double-click on the zip file or folder. The Zipper is Windows XP's way of indicating that the file or folder has been zipped. Once you double-click on that file or folder, it should open like a regular file or folder on your computer. If you don't have Windows ME or XP or Apple OS-X you need to download and install a special piece of software that will zip and unzip files.

You can download a free evaluation version of WinZip at http://www.winzip.com/ddchomea.htm. Download the program and then install it (you may need permission from your computer administrator). After that, whenever you encounter a compressed or zipped file (a file that ends in ".zip"), just double-click the file.Your unzip program will automatically open, and you can then choose where you want the unzipped version of that file to be saved on your computer.

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Q4: Can I get a list of the different type of reports are available?

A: The titles of all SEW reports are viewable under the View Reports link, Title field. To see the reports associated with a specific file type or category, first select a Category. This narrows the list of reports available.

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Q5: How can I determine which reports are related to my MR87, F496, VDF and Match Files?

A: Within Manage Files you can click on the File Name for every MatchFile, MR87, VDF and F496 that was transmitted or uploaded and Associated Reports will display within the summary information. Click on the number next to Associated Reports and the reports that generated by CalSTRS for those files display.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q6: I am a Secure Employer Web site user authorized as a Report Unit, why can't I view certain categories of reports in the View Reports page?

A: Verify your permissions for the report category you wish to view. Contact your Employer Administrator to modify your permissions as necessary. If you have the expected permissions and still cannot view a specific report, keep in mind that most of the reports within the Secure Employer Web site are not segregated by Report Unit and are only for Report Sources to view because they contain information from numerous Report Units. Reports that can be viewed by Report Units include:

- MR87 Copy to Database
- Account Inquiry - Change Report
- MatchFile Response (If the Match Request File was transmitted from the Report Unit)
- File Summary and File Detail Reports

Note: If the Report Source uploaded the file, the Report Unit uses View Reports to see the information. The Report Unit only sees information for their particular Report Unit.

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Q7: I'm searching by Social Security Numbers (SSN) in the File Detail screen and it's taking a long time. Is something wrong?

A: Nothing is wrong. However, the SSN field is encrypted (protected) and a search on this field may take longer than a search on another field. To speed up your search, add additional search criteria (e.g. part of the employee's Last Name).

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Defined Benefit Program: Information for Defined Benefit Employers

Q1: Can I view past exception reports?

A: Exception reports are retained within SEW for 2 years from the date the file was transmitted, plus the number of days until the next fiscal year.

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Q2: I transmitted an F496 and I have not received variance reports. What should I do?

A: If you have not received variance reports from CalSTRS, contact Accounting at AccountControl@CalSTRS.com.

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Cash Balance Program: Information for Cash Balance Employers

Q1: Can Cash Balance districts report directly through Secure Employer Web site?

A: Yes, if they are a Cash Balance report source to CalSTRS.

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Q2: Can Cash Balance employers make online corrections?

A: Yes. Cash Balance employers can make corrections to Cash Balance lines within SEW once permission is established.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q3: Can Cash Balance employers submit a Remittance Advice using SEW?

A: Yes. With the proper permissions a CB employer (Report Source only) can submit a Remittance Advice by using the Remittance Advice link and following the instructions.

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Match File: CalSTRS Match File Process Information

Q1: What is the FastTrack Match File process and how does it work?

A: The FastTrack Match File process is designed to provide employers with timely and accurate information about their employee's records on CalSTRS' systems. Employers transmit a file containing a list of SSN #s and birthdates of some or all of their employees to CalSTRS. CalSTRS will automatically process the file and generate a response, usually within less than 1 hour. The response file provides information from CalSTRS systems regarding the membership status, name, address, and other demographic information on file in CalSTRS systems.

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Q2: When should I transmit a FastTrack Match File?

A: The FastTrack Match File process is intended to help employers avoid reporting exceptions. Ideally you should complete your FastTrack Match File process and reconcile all employee records prior to finalizing your payroll.

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Q3: What format should the FastTrack Match File be in to transmit?

A: The FastTrack Match File is a simple text file with the employees' Social Security numbers and birthdates. For a complete description of the FastTrack Match File Process, please review the latest file specification document under the Data Submission link on the SEW Home page.

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Q4: How many records can an employer include in the FastTrack Match File?

A: The maximum number of records in a single file is 200,000.

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Q5: How large can a FastTrack Match File response be? How long will it take to download?

A: The FastTrack Match File response will be around one half of a kilobyte per record, the size of the report will vary based on the number of records requested. The download time will vary depending on your connection speed.

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Q6: Can a report unit transmit a FastTrack Match File? Can a report unit view the response?

A: Yes, report units can transmit a FastTrack Match File and view the response if their Employer Administrator provides them with the proper permission.

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Q7: Why would a report unit want to transmit a FastTrack Match File?

A: A report unit may want to review their employee's membership status or other information.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q8: One of the new status values is "REVERTED" - What does that mean?

A: In CalSTRS old computer system, member and nonmember accounts that had no activity for a period, but which had a balance of funds, had their status changed to "REVERTED". If activity started again, or a refund was requested, the status was changed back. The current computer system (START) does not change inactive accounts to the "REVERTED" status, but there will be older accounts still in the "REVERTED" status. The prior account status can be found in the "Prior DB Account Status" field on the match file record.

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Q9: What are the status values for the new FastTrack Match File process?

A: The previous match file passed back spaces in the two character field if the value was not one of the ten values below. With the new FastTrack Match File process, CalSTRS is passing down the value that we have for each record that the Report Source or Report Unit queries on.

01 MEMBER CalSTRS Member
02 NONMBR Non Member
03 REFUND Refund
04 ACTVDIED Active Died
05 SRPRE72 PRE-1972 SERVICE RETIREMENT
06 DRPRE72 PRE-1972 DISABILITY RETIREMENT
07 SR SERVICE RETIREMENT
08 DA DISABILITY ALLOWANCE (COV A)
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Errors: Understanding Integrity Check, Business Rule, Variance Rule and Warning Errors

Q1: Do I need to have the Integrity Checks, Business Rules, Variance Rules and Warnings automated in my payroll/HR system?

A: CalSTRS does not require you to automate these within your system; however, CalSTRS strongly recommends that you consider it. Many of these are basic file formatting and valid value rules that can be coded into your system. If you would like more information about this possibility, contact CalSTRS Employer Reporting Project at ERP@CalSTRS.com.

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Q2: Do I have to fix all of my Integrity Check, Business Rule, Variance Rule and Warning errors?

A: Yes, you are responsible for correcting each error with the exception of warning errors. However, to transmit the file to CalSTRS you will only need to correct certain errors. On the File Summary page there is a Correction Required column that indicates whether that particular error must be corrected prior to transmission to CalSTRS.

If you transmit a file to CalSTRS with errors, you are still responsible for correcting those errors. Pursuant to Education Code Sections 23006 and 23008, CalSTRS may assess penalties for late or erroneous reporting. You have 60 days after discovery or notification by CalSTRS to submit adjustments. Any adjustment not received, or received later than 60 days may be subject to penalties.

Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q3: I'm having trouble with an error, who should I contact for help?

A: If you are a Report Unit, contact your County Office of Education for problems troubleshooting an error. If you are a Report Source, contact your MAS Representative or EmployerHelp@CalSTRS.com.

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Q4: Can CalSTRS correct my Integrity Check, Business Rule, Variance Rule and Warning errors?

A: CalSTRS can help you troubleshoot and suggest how to correct your errors, but the system will not allow us to make the corrections. You are responsible for submitting timely and accurate retirement data.

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Q5: I have DB error MO-I017 (type code invalid) or CB error VD-I001 (Record Type code invalid) but I cannot find the error within the File Details section in SEW. Where will I find information?

A: This error is not displayed within the File Details page on SEW since CalSTRS cannot determine what type of line it is. This specific error is listed within the downloadable File Detail report (PDF only). You can access this report by clicking on Download Detail Report at the top of the File Details page and selecting the PDF option.

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Q6: Will fixing my Integrity Check, Business Rule, Variance Rule and Warning errors impact my exception count?

A: Yes, the Business and Variance Rules will have a direct impact on your exception counts. Correcting all of your errors will significantly reduce your exception counts. However, SEW does not contain every Business Rule that we apply to your F496 during final processing. You may have additional errors (exceptions) after your file goes through final processing at CalSTRS.

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Q7: Where can I find reference information for Integrity Check, Business Rule, Variance Rule and Warning errors?

A: From the SEW Home page, click on Data Submission on the right hand side. The File Specification link contains reference material regarding each Integrity Check, Business Rule, Variance Rule and Warning error.

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Q8: What is a warning and do I have to correct warnings?

A: A warning is an error on your file that should be corrected; however CalSTRS does not require you to correct warnings since they will not create a critical problem when CalSTRS processes the file in the corporate database.

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Employer Notification: Understanding Employer Notifications

Q1: Can I see Cash Balance related status changes?

A: No, only Defined Benefit status changes are subject to notification, and only DB users see them.

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Q2: Why can't I see status changes that were initiated by my Report Source/Unit?

A: On the Employer Notification page you must check the box that says "Include status changes initiated by this…" to see status changes that your Report Source/Unit initiated.

Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q3: As a Report Source, can I view the status changes initiated by one of my Report Units?

A: Yes, any status change made by a Report Unit will be viewable by their Report Source on the Employer Notification page. You must check the box that says "Include status changes initiated by this…" to see status changes that your Report Units initiated.

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Q4: What DB status changes create a notification?

A: Employer Notifications occur when updates have been made to a member's status OR status date. All employers reporting that individual within the current fiscal year or prior year will receive notifications. The updates that trigger notifications fall into three categories:

- **Changes**- trigger a notification of a membership status change or an effective date change. With certain membership statuses you may receive 2 notifications for an effective date change (e.g.: changing a retirement date creates a notification when the date is withdrawn and a notification when the new date is entered).

- **Additions**- trigger a notification when a status is added to an account.

- **Deletions**- trigger a notification of the cancellation of a status and return to the prior status and the prior status effective date (e.g. service retirement application cancelled).

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Q5: Who should be receiving a notification of a status change?

A: On the date a status change occurs, all affected Report Sources and Units are eligible for notification if they have either submitted a Contribution Line to CalSTRS for an affected employee in the current fiscal year or submitted a Contribution Line to CalSTRS for an affected employee in the prior fiscal year.

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Q6: How often is SEW updated with new notifications?

A: SEW will post any new status changes every 30 minutes.

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Q7: What does the number in parenthesis next to the Employer Notification link mean?

A: The number in parenthesis is the number of new notifications for the current calendar day that were not initiated by the Report Source/Unit logged in.

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Q8: How long are notifications displayed in SEW?

A: Notifications are retained and viewable in SEW for 2 year after the original notification date.

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REAP: Understanding REAP

Q1: How do I get access to REAP functionality within SEW?

A: SEW users must have their Employer Administrator grant them access to REAP functionality. Click on "Help" on the SEW home page to find your Employer Administrator contact information.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q2: Can I make updates to CalSTRS records by using REAP functionality within SEW? What kind of updates can I make?

A: Yes, if you have REAP Update access. You can use REAP update functionality to change names, establish CalSTRS accounts and change CalSTRS account status for your employees.

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Q3: Can I use REAP functionality to fix certain business rule errors on my F496 file?

A: Yes, if you have REAP update access, you can fix business rule errors related to name and CalSTRS account status mismatches. You can also fix business rule errors related to unmatched or incomplete CalSTRS accounts (e.g. business rule error MO-B001 – No Account for Tax ID). Refer to the SEW F496 Contribution File Specification 3.0 or the SEW Voluntary Deduction File (VDF) Specification within the Data Submission link on the SEW Home Page for guidance on how to fix business rule errors.

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Q4: Can I still access the old REAP functionality via a VPN connection? Will both versions of REAP be available?

A: No. The REAP system via VPN is no longer being supported by CalSTRS.

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Secure Message Center

Q1: Who can send/ receive Secure Messages?

A: Any SEW user can send or receive a Secure Message to any other SEW user. Employers can communicate with other employers or with CalSTRS.

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Q2: What types of files can be attached to a Secure Message?

A: Each Secure Message communication chain can include one attachment, added at any time. The maximum size is 1MB. The following file types can be attached to a secure message:

- Word document (.DOC)
- PowerPoint Presentation (.PPT)
- Excel Workbook (.XLS)
- Windows zip file (.ZIP)
- Comma Separated Values file (.CSV)
- Tagged Image file (.TIF)
- Portable Document Format (.PDF)
- Microsoft Outlook Message (.MSG)
- Microsoft Outlook Message Format (.OFT)
- Hypertext Markup Language (.HTML)
- Hypertext Markup (.HTM)
- Text Only (.TXT)

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Q3: How do I know when I have a new Secure Message?

A: A number appears next to the Secure Message Center link on the home page. The number indicates how many new messages you have. Once a message is read, it will no longer be counted as a new message. If you are corresponding with another employer or with CalSTRS and have a new response to a message, it will be counted as a "new" message in your message counter.

Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Online Corrections

Q1: I made some corrections last month and now I'm seeing the same errors this month. What went wrong?

A: Verify that you made changes in your payroll system. Whenever you make corrections online, print the resulting "File Correction Report" and use it to make needed corrections in your payroll system.

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Annotations

Q1: What is an annotation?

A: An annotation is a note that is associated with a file, report or line within the Secure Employer Web site. All SEW users can view or add annotations to a file, report or line that the user has permission to view.

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Q2: How do I know if my file, line or report has an annotation?

A: A small text bubble next to the Name indicates that annotations exist for the file, line or report. If a bubble appears next to a File name, the annotation may actually exist on the line.

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Q3: How do I view an annotation?

A: Select the file, line or report. Scroll down to the Annotations bar at the bottom of the screen. Click on View and the annotation text displays.

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Q4: Is there any way to tell who made an annotation?

A: Yes. All annotations contain and date/time stamp as well as the username of the individual who created it.

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Q5: How do I add an annotation?

A: Select the file, line or report. The "Annotations" bar is located at the very bottom of the screen. Click New and type your note. Click Save once your note is complete. All SEW users will now see that an annotation exists on the note, file or report.

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Q6: While viewing my list of Files, I see an annotation bubble. However, when I view the File Summary, there is no Annotation, what happened?

A: The annotation likely exists on a particular line within the file. If you go the File Details page, the annotation should appear next to the appropriate line.

Variance

Q1: If my cash matches my F496 Report, why do I have variances?

A: Variances occur for various reasons; but commonly occur due to errors within a line or excluding cash for particular lines. Ultimately, the cash that was remitted to CalSTRS is different from the contributions calculated as due by CalSTRS based on the information that was reported on your F496. Training materials are available in SEW on the variance reports process. These materials should help you work through the variance report to determine why there is a difference. If more help is needed, please contact AccountControl@CalSTRS.com.

Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q2: If one of our employers cannot collect contributions from a member, do we have to pay CalSTRS the full amount?

A: Yes, any line reported with contributions must have the matching cash remitted. Contributions are considered due from both the employer and the employee for each reported line. It is the Employer's responsibility to remit the monies due to CalSTRS per Section 23000 of the Education Code.

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Q3: What if one of our employees quits and we cannot collect from them? Why do we have to pay CalSTRS?

A: The contributions for all reported lines are due to CalSTRS. Variance reports are based on calculated amounts due for all lines. If the cash you remit does not include monies for some reported lines, CalSTRS will calculate a variance.

We suggest that you establish an accounts receivable for the employee and begin trying to collect the money you are due.

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Q4: Should we report lines even when we haven't collected member contributions?

A: Yes, according to Education Code 23005 all lines are due to CalSTRS 30 days after the end of the service period of which compensation was earned.

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Q5: What will happen if we report a line with no member contributions?

A: The unfunded line will create a variance and you will be responsible for either correcting the line if it is reported in error, or satisfying the variance.

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Q6: What kind of detail will we get when CalSTRS finds a variance?

A: There are a set of 6 variance reports which will give you information on detail of your variances from a high summary level to a detail line level.

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Q7: Will CalSTRS give us resources to research variances?

A: CalSTRS developed an electronic download that is available as a part of the variance reports. This download contains only lines with a variance (2 or more cents) in the month that it was reported. This download is in addition to the 5 other variance reports.

You may import the information into MS Excel or Access to research current or aged variances. If additional help is needed, you may contact AccountControl@CalSTRS.com.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q8: How does CalSTRS actually calculate the contribution variance?

A: The system uses the information from each line on the F496 and, through a series of edits and other business logic, recalculates the contributions due from member and employer. We then match the calculated amount due to the amount of cash that was remitted by counties for contributions for that reporting for a period.

A reported variance is the difference between the contributions reported on the F496 report and the contribution amounts calculated by CalSTRS.

The annual variance is the accumulation of all variances within a specific fiscal year.

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Q9: To which number on the variance reports should my 496 report total reconcile?

A: The Employer should reconcile their contributions to CalSTRS calculations of amounts due based on their F496 supplied information. CalSTRS provides tools to determine what the Employer has reported and remitted verses what CalSTRS has calculated through monthly variance reports.

If there are differences, the Employer is responsible for either correcting the line in contention or remitting the difference. If the difference results in an overpayment, the Employer may adjust the next month's remittance accordingly (accept at the end of the fiscal year).

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Q10: Will there be a threshold for variance amounts on a line, for a reporting period, or for the reporting source overall?

A: Currently, CalSTRS will report back to the Employers any variance of .02 cents or more per line. Currently, there is no threshold for a reporting period. We require that the Employer pay all contributions calculated by CalSTRS, therefore it is in the Employer's and the Member's best interest to correct the corresponding lines. However, CalSTRS' current practice is to adjust any annual variance for contributions at the end of the fiscal year where the total variance is +/- $10.00. If you have questions on how to correct errors on a line, please contact your Member Account Services Representative.

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Q11: What should I do if I forget to send a remittance advice for a payment?

A: Remittance advices should be sent via SEW on or before the date of deposit.

CalSTRS utilizes the remittance advice in many ways, but most importantly to post the remittances to the report period you have identified therein (if possible). If you forget to send a remittance advice for a payment, contact AccountControl@CalSTRS.com.

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Secure Employer Web Site Frequently Asked Questions

Q12: I have an underpaid variance but do not have time to research it yet; do you recommend that I pay the amount now?

A: CalSTRS requires cash to be remitted for all calculated contribution values. If you don't have time to research the variance, you should remit the underpaid variance. If at a later date you have determined that the line was reported in error and contributions should not have been calculated, you may reduce your total contributions submitted to reflect the reversal of the line in question.

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